

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03
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P R 142017Z JAN 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9339
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
AMCONSUL CALI
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, ECON, CO
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. A PROPOSAL BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO WNACT
ELECTION REFORM BY SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS RECEIVED THE
SUPPORT OF POLITICAL LEADERS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND GEISEL
EXCHANGED TELEGRAMS ON A MEETING TO STABILIZE COFFEE PRICES.
THE MANAGER OF COLOMBIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS CHARGED THAT
FOREIGN (INCLUDING U.S.) COMPANIES HAD SOLD THE RAILWAY
DEFECTIVE EQUIPMENT. RATIONING OF ELECTRICITY HAS BEEN
INSTITUTED IN BOGOTA AND OTHER LOCATIONS. THE NEW NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY RECTOR PROPOSES TO END POLITICAL VIOLENCE AT THE
UNIVERSITY. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT LOPEZ PROPOSES ELECTORAL REFORM BY SPECIAL
SESSION OF CONGRESS. A PROPOSAL BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ ON
JANUARY 11 TO LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE
PARTY FACTIONS, THAT ELECTORAL REFORMS BE ENACTED BY A
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SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS, HAS RECEIVED A UNIFORMLY
FAVORABLE RECEPTION. THE REFORMS CONTEMPLATE SUCH CHANGES
AS THE INCLUSION IN THE ELECTORAL COURT OF REPRESENTATIVES
OF MINORITY POLITICAL PARTIES, THE ELECTION BY CONGRESS OF
THE NATIONAL REGISTRAR, CREATION OF URBAN AND RURAL DISTRICTS
AND REGULARIZATION OF VOTING REGISTRATION. THE ACCEPTANCE
OF LOPEZ' PROPOSAL BY THE POLITICAL LEADERS APPEARS TO MAKE

CERTAIN THE CONVOCAION BY THE PRESIDENT OF A SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS, PROBABLY IN FEBRUARY, WHICH WOULD PROBABLY PASS THE REFORM PROPOSALS INTO LAW. THE PROPOSED CHANGES WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF PROTECTING THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AGAINST THE FRAUD AND CHARGES OF FRAUD WHICH HAVE MARRED THE INTEGRITY OF SOME PREVIOUS ELECTIONS.

3. PRESIDENTS LOPEZ AND GEISEL EXCHANGE TELEGRAMS ABOUT COFFEE. AFTER A WEEK OF NEGATIVE REACTION IN THE COLOMBIAN PRESS TO THE CONSUMER COFFEE BOYCOTT, PRESIDENT LOPEZ SENT A TELEGRAM TO THE BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT SUGGESTING A MEETING TO EXPLORE MEASURES TO STABILIZE COFFEE PRICES. PRESIDENT GEISEL'S REPLY SUGGESTED THAT THE COFFEE COUNCIL WAS THE APPROPRIATE CONTEXT FOR THE DISCUSSIONS. IN THE MEANTIME THE PRESS AND POLITICIANS HAVE CONTINUED TO GIVE A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION TO THE COFFEE BOYCOTT. COMMENTATORS WHO JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO UNIVERSALLY THOUGHT COFFEE PRICES WERE HIGH, ARE NOW NATIONALISTICALLY DEFENDING CURRENT HIGH COFFEE PRICES.

4. NATIONAL RAILWAY CHARGES FOREIGN COMPANIES SOLD DEFECTIVE EQUIPMENT. IN INTERVIEWS GIVEN TO TWO MAJOR BOGOTA DAILIES JANUARY 12 AND 13, MARCO TULIO LORA, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY, CHARGED THAT SEVERAL FOREIGN COMPANIES HAD SOLD DEFECTIVE LOCOMOTIVES TO THE RAILWAY. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, 38 OUT OF 88 LOCOMOTIVES PURCHASED FROM BABCOCK & WILCOX OF SPAIN WITH COMPONENT PARTS SUPPLIED BY GENERAL ELECTRICA ESPANOLA AND CATERPILLAR, U.S.A., HAVE SUFFERED SERIOUS AND PREMATURE MECHANICAL FAILURES. CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM WAS EVENTUALLY FOUND TO BE FAULTY PISTONS, UNCLASSIFIED

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WHICH HAD BEEN SUPPLIED BY CATERPILLAR. ALTHOUGH THE PISTONS ARE BEING REPLACED AND A NEW FUEL SYSTEM INSTALLED TO AVOID FUTURE PISTON FAILURE, THE NATIONAL RAILWAY MANAGER IS DEMANDING COMPENSATION FOR LOSS REVENUE. INDUSTRY COURCES INDICATE, HOWEVER, THAT THE HIGH OUT-OF-SERVICE TIME FOR THE RAILWAY'S LOCOMOTIVES IS DUE TO A MYRIAD OF CAUSES, OF WHICH THE PISTON FAILURE IS NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT. SINCE THE SALES CONTRACT WAS BETWEEN THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY AND BABCOCK & WILCOX, ANY LEGAL ACTION TO RECOVER LOSS OF PROFITS WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN AGAINST THAT COMPANY ALONE. THE U.S. COMPANIES WOULD BE ONLY INDIRECTLY CONCERNED.

5. ELECTRIC RATIONING IMPOSED. CONTINUED LACK OF RAIN THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA HAS FORCED THE GOVERNMENT TO INSTITUTE RATIONING OF ELECTRICITY. MINISTRY OF MINES AND ENERGY JAIME GARCIA PARRA ANNOUNCED JANUARY 13 A NATIONWIDE EFFORT TO CONSERVE ELECTRIC ENERGY. IN BOGOTA, ELECTRICITY SUPPLIED TO RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS OF THE CITY WILL BE CUT OFF FOR A TOTAL OF SIX HOURS DAILY. THIS MEASURE

IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO DIVERT ELECTRIC ENERGY FROM THE BOGOTA AREA TO THOSE OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCING SEVERE POWER SHORTAGES. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE EMERGENCY WILL LAST AT LEAST UNTIL LATE MARCH OR EARLY APRIL.(BOGOTA 420).

6. NEW NATIONAL UNIVERSITY RECTOR. OSMAR CORREAL CABRAL, A YOUNG ECONOMIST AND EDUCATOR APPOINTED AS THE NEW RECTOR OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (NU), ANNOUNCED AT THE 10 JANUARY SWEARING IN CEREMONY THAT HE WILL ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND TO PUT AN END TO THE POLITICALLY CAUSE VIOLENCE WHICH PROMPTED THE CLOSURE OF THE NU BY THE GOVERNMENT ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN RECENT YEARS. CORREAL ALSO COMMENTED THAT THE NU BUDGET HAS BEEN DOUBLED FOR THE COMING YEAR AND THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS AT THE NU CAMPUSES THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA HAS BEEN STABILIZED AT 38,880, THE SAME NUMBER AS IN 1976.

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